

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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P R 111339Z MAY 78
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9942
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, TU
SUBJ: SITUATION OF ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IN ISTANBUL

REF: A) STATE 102664; B) ISTANBUL 0745; C) STATE 085619

SUMMARY: DISCUSSIONS WITH GOVERNOR OF ISTANBUL AND
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH INDICATE THAT THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE
PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING COMMITMENTS TO REDRESS PROBLEMS OF
GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY MADE BY PRIME MINISTER ECEVIT ON
MARCH 9. END SUMMARY

1. ON MAY 5, CONSUL GENERAL HAD TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH GOVERNOR
OF ISTANBUL, IHSAN TEKIN. DURING THAT MEETING GOT IMPLEMENTATION
OF PRIME MINISTER ECEVIT'S MARCH 9 COMMITMENTS FOR RESPONSE TO
GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY CONCERNS WAS DISCUSSED AT LENGTH.
ON MAY 8, AMBASSADOR PAID COURTESY CALL ON ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
ACCOMPANIED BY CONSUL GENERAL AND DISCUSSED SAME SUBJECT.
PATRIARCH INDICATED THAT THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS ON IMPLEMTATION
MARCH 9 COMMITMENTS. GOVERNOR PROVIDED DETAILED,
POINT-BY-POINT ACCOUNT OF GOT ACTION ON EACH MAJOR ISSUE
OUTLINED IN ECEVIT'S STATEMENT (REF A). PATRIARCH CONFIRMED
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PROGRESS IN SEVERAL AREAS AND IMPROVEMENT IN GENERAL
ATMOSPHERE ALTHOUGH HE WAS, AS ALWAYS, CIRCUMSPECT IN HIS
ASSESSMENTS. HE NOTED THAT ECEVIT GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO
HIS COMMUNITY'S PROBLEMS WAS SYMPATHETIC, AND CONSIDERED THAT
PROSPECTS WERE GOOD FOR RESOLVING REMAINING ISSUES. IN
SUBSEQUENT COURTESY CALL BY AMBASSADOR ON ARMENIAN PATRIARCH,
LATTER WAS EQUALLY POSITIVZ ABOUT ARMENIAN COMMUNITY RELA-

TIONS WITH GOT.

2. FOLLOWING IS UPDATE ON SPECIFIC AREAS IN WHICH
ECEVIT PROMISED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION (REF B):

A) TRAVEL: GOVERNOR TEKIN SAID THAT ALL RESTRICTION
ON TRAVEL BY GREEK ORTHODOX HIERARCHY HAD BEEN LIFTED.
PATRIARCH CONFIRMED THAT PASSPORTS HAD BEEN ISSUED TO
METROPOLITANS PREVIOUSLY DENIED THEM. TWO OF THEM,
METROPOLITANS MELITON AND BARTHOLOMEW WERE TRAVELING
IN EUROPE. (WE MIGHT ADD THAT THEIR ABSENCE HAS DELAYED
OUR REPLY TO REF A SINCE THEY ARE OUR BEST WORKING
CONTACTS AT ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE.)

B) TAXES: GOVERNOR STATED THAT EXCEPTION HAS BEEN
ACCORDED GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS BY
ECEVIT GOVERNMENT WHEREBY THEY ARE EXCUSED PAYMENT OF
PROPERTY TAX. APPARENTLY, SAME EXCEPTION IS BEING APPLIED
TO FIVE PERCENT INSPECTION FEE ON GROSS INCOME LEVIED BY
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FOUNDATIONS, WHICH, ACCORDING TO
GOVERNOR TEKIN, GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY, HAS NEVER PAID.
PATRIARCH CONFIRMED THAT AFTER THEIR RAISING MATTER WITH
ECEVIT, GOT HAS EXCUSED COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS FROM PROPERTY
TAX PAYMENTS. HE ALSO SAID THAT ACCORDING TO ARRANGEMENT
TAXES WILL BE PAID OUT OF ISTANBUL GOVERNOR'S BUDGET.

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C) SCHOOLS: GOVERNOR STATED THAT APPOINTMENT OF NEW
PRINCIPALS FOR GREEK COMMUNITY SCHOOLS HAD BEEN HELD UP
SINCE CANDIDATES PREVIOUSLY PROPOSED DID NOT MEET
QUALIFICATIONS PRESCRIBED BY PRIVATE SCHOOLS LAW OF 1967
WHICH REQUIRED THAT PRINCIPAL HAVZ EITHER TWO YEARS TEACHING
OR FIVE YEARS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION EXPERIENCE.
AFTER REVIEWING SITUATION, HOWEVER, IT WAS AGREED TO
ACCEPT APPOINTMENT OF CANDIDATED WITH SOME OF REQUIRED
EXPERIENCE. PATRIARCH NOTED THIS ISSUE BUT DID NOT PURSUE
THE SUBJECT. WE WILL CHECK ON IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORT
WHEN WE DEVZLOP FURTHER INFORMATION.

D) REPAIRS: GOVERNOR STATED THAT BOTH HE AND PRIME
MINISTER ECEVIT WERE SURPRISED WHEN INFORMED OF DIFFICULTIES
GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY HAS ENCOUNTERED OBTAINING PERMISSION
FOR EVEN MINOR REPAIRS ON CHURCH AND OTHER COMMUNAL BUILDINGS.
AS WE HAD CONCLUDED IN PREVIOUS REPORTING, GOVERNOR FOUND
THAT REQUESTS FOR REPAIRS WERE BOGGED DOWN IN MUNICIPAL
BUREAUCRACY. GOVERNOR SAID HE HAD ORDERED THAT PERMITS FOR
SUCH WORK BE APPROVED. STATUS THIS ISSUE NOT COMPLETELY
CLEAR AS PATRIARCH INDICATED SOME REPAIRS AUTHORIZED BYT
IT WAS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FOR REPAIRS VALUED

OVER A CERTAIN AMOUNT. IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHETHER PATRIARCH'S COMMENTS POST OR PRE-DATED GOVERNOR'S AUTHORIZATION OF REPAIRS. HE DID, HOWEVER, CITE SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF ONE CHURCH WHERE REPAIRS WERE MADE AS RESULT OF NEW POLICY.

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3. COMMENT: GOVERNOR TEKIN WAS WELL BRIEFED ON ISSUES AND SAID HE HAD GONE OVER SAME MATERIAL WITH EDGAR BRONFMAN FROM APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION (REF C). (MR. BRONFMAN DID NOT CONTACT CONGEN DURING HIS VISIT TO ISTANBUL.) PATRIARCH WAS IN GENERAL HOPEFUL ABOUT ECEVIT'S INTENTIONS, BUT OBSERVED THAT TRADITIONALLY WHEN RELATIONS BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY ARE GOOD SAME APPLIES TO RELATIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND TURKISH GOVERNMENT, AND VICE VERSA. THIS NATURAL CONNECTION ACCORDS WITH PRECEPTION OF OTHER GREEK MINORITY MEMBERS WHO TRACK COMMUNITY DIFFICULTIES WITH EVOLUTION OF CYPRUS PROBLEM. SOME OF ISSUES WE DISCUSSED WITH PATRIARCH INVOLVE COMPLICATED TAX AND LEGAL QUESTIONS WHICH UNFORTUNATELY WE COULD NOT PURSUE IN DEPTH DURING AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL. WE WILL SEEK AND REPORT WHEN AVAILABLE MORE PRECISE STATEMENT OF GREEK COMMUNITY VIEWPOINT.

4. MONITORING PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF MARCH 9 COMMITMENTS WILL BE LONG-TERM PROJECT AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO ASSESS GOT FOLLOW-THROUGH. INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, ARE THAT GOT IS SINCERE ABOUT INTRODUCING POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD GREEK ORTHODIX MINORITY. ACCORDING GOVERNOR'S BRIEFING, SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE TOWARD
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FULLFILLING ECEVIT'S PROMISE OF REDRESS FOR THEIR COMPLAINTS. TURKS, HOWEVER, DO NOT VIEW THIS AS ONE-WAY STREET. GOVERNOR ALSO MENTIONED PROBLEMS OF TURKISH MINORITY IN GREECE SPECIFICALLY POINTING OUT OBSTACLES RAISED THERE TO MEMBERS OF TURKISH MINORITY SELLING PROPERTY TO ANOTHER TURK. HE STATED THAT ECEVIT RAISED THIS ISSUE WITH CARAMANLIS AT MONTREUX. ACCORDING TO TEKIN, GREEK PRIME MINISTER REGISTERED SAME SURPRISE AT HEARING OF ISSUE AS THAT DESCRIBED ABOVE AS ECEVIT'S REACTION UPON HEARING OF GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH'S DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING REPAIRS APPROVED.

5. DURING HIS CALL ON GOVERNOR, CONSUL GENERAL DID NOT MAKE REPRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF GREEK COMMUNITY; RATHER, HE INTRODUCED SUBJECT IN CONTEXT OF CONCERN OF GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IN UNITED STATES AS EXPRESSED TO DEPARTMENT OF STATE OVER STATUS OF COMMUNITY HERE. WE HAVE GOOD RAPPORT WITH GOVERNOR, AND HE ACCEPTED THIS AS LEGITIMATE TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION AND SEEMED TO WELCOME OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS HIS POSITION. HE WAS FRANK IN HIS COMMENTS AND APPEARED TO HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE. THIS ATTITUDE FROM HIS OFFICIAL MOST DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH PROBLEMS OF ISTANBUL MINORITY COMMUNITIES SEEMS GOOD INDICATION THAT POSITIVE ACTION BY US ON ITS PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED POLICY TOWARD GREEK ORTHODOX WILL CONTINUE UNDER PRESENT GOVERNMENT. AT THIS POINT, CONGEN DOES NOT RECOMMEND ANY FURTHER ACTION BY US TO PROMOTE INTERESTS OF GREEK COMMUNITY HERE. GIVEN IMPROVED ATMOSPHERE WHICH BOTH GREEK ORTHODOX AND ARMENIAN PATRIARCHS NOTE AND COMPLETE BRIEFING GOVERNOR GAVE CONGEN, WE BELIEVE ANY FURTHER ACTION HERE IS UNNECESSARY AND WOULD BE MISUNDERSTOOD. THROUGH OUR APPROACHES, BOTH GOVERNOR AND PATRIARCHATE ARE AWARE OF OUR INTEREST AND CONCERN

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AND PATRIARCH EXPRESSED APPRECIATION TO AMBASSADOR FOR THIS.

6. WE ARE FORWARDING MEMCON OF CONSUL GENERAL'S CONVERSATION WITH GOVERNOR SEPARATELY. TO PRESERVE CONFIDENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP, WE WOULD PREFER THAT GOVERNOR NOT BE DIRECTLY REFERRED TO IN ANY PUBLIC RESPONSE ON ABOVE SUBJECT.

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